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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001621

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: GREEKS, ARMENIANS PREDICTING CALM DURING HOLY FIRE  
CELEBRATION

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Jerusalem religious officials from the Greek and Armenian Patriarchates are cautiously optimistic that the April 22 Holy Fire celebration in Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulcher will pass without incident. Greek Patriarchate officials April 21 were confident that deposed Patriarch Irineos will not seek to participate in the ceremonies, despite widespread rumors to the contrary. The officials noted that despite the Government of Israel's non-recognition of Theofolis as Greek Patriarch, the Israeli Police have nonetheless adequately coordinated security procedures. Meanwhile, Greek Patriarchate officials confirmed that the Israeli Supreme Court has postponed a review of the church's petition for GOI recognition of the new Patriarch until July. End summary.

Holy Fire

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12. (C) In separate April 21 meetings with ConGen Poloff, Greek Patriarch Theofolis and Bishop Aristarchus, the General Secretary of the Greek Patriarchate, voiced confidence that

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the Holy Fire ceremony -- which marks the symbolic resurrection of Jesus in the Orthodox Christian tradition -- would proceed peacefully on April 22 in the Holy Sepulcher Church. The ceremony has historically produced tensions, and on occasion, physical violence between the Greek and Armenian clergy and worshipers. This tension has been mixed with rumors that the deposed Greek Patriarch Irineos would attempt to participate in this year's ceremony. Bishop Aristarchus acknowledged that such rumors had spread in Greece and Jerusalem, but said that they were without merit. (Note: Irineos is presently sequestered in his residence in the Greek Patriarchate in the Old City of Jerusalem, guarded by Israeli police, since his removal as Patriarch last year. Jordan, the PA, and Greece have formally recognized Theofolis as the new Patriarch; Israel has not. End note.)

13. (C) Aristarchus said the Patriarchate had coordinated with the Israeli Police in preparation for the Holy Fire ceremony and expected the police to cooperate fully with Theofolis during the ceremony.

Israeli Court Action  
Deferred Until July

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14. (C) Aristarchus and Patriarch Theofolis confirmed that the Israeli Supreme Court last month deferred ruling on the Patriarchate's petition for GOI recognition of Patriarch Theofolis until July. In the interim, the Court referred the

petition to the Israeli Government for further consideration.

Theofolis suggested that the Supreme Court's delay stemmed from the Court's reluctance to delve into religious matters. He expressed hope that the GOI would eventually recognize him as the new Greek Patriarch.

WALLES